

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

**Remarks at a Black History Month Reception**  
*February 27, 2023*

*The President.* Good job. I think they just filed your application.

*Vice President Kamala D. Harris.* I think he's going to get in. *[Laughter]* Oh, you make us so proud. You make us so proud. You'll get in. You're going to get in. *[Laughter]* And you're going to be a wonderful Bison. A wonderful Bison.

Well, thank you, DuWayne, for that introduction and your life of service. You have already chosen to live a life of service and leadership.

You know, I think that we all know, and part of our tradition and our responsibility is to remind our young people that you are born a leader. And it's just a matter of when you decide to turn that on—*[laughter]*—and you decided at an early age. And your country and we all benefit from that work. So thank you.

So, to everyone here—all of DuWayne's friends—*[laughter]*—our President Joe Biden, members of our Cabinet who are here, Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, and to everyone here, and, in particular, our young leaders: Thank you all for your leadership and for us all being together this afternoon.

So, during Black History Month, we celebrate all of those who—through courage and conviction; through resistance and resilience; from bold discoveries and cutting-edge research, to arts and music, and a myriad of other disciplines—advanced freedom, liberty, and opportunity for the benefit of all Americans.

We celebrate legends whose words and their work inspire millions and millions not only in our country, but around the world.

And we celebrate the others whose names are less well-known: from those who led the fight for abolition to factory workers and Pullman Porters who built the middle class; from Tuskegee Airmen, who took on both fascism and racism, to freedom fighters and Freedom Riders and marchers, who stood tall and sat in; from astronauts, who blazed a trail to the stars and ignited our imagination, to those who continue to make impact as faith leaders and activists, teachers and small-business owners.

All of the hard-working people who inspire our children to dream with ambition and aspiration, to determine their own future, and to live up to their God-given potential.

It is those stories that remind us that Black history is American history. *[Laughter]* Living history. Breathing history. History that we create every day. And history that we then must teach and celebrate. A history that helps us to understand how the past has influenced the present and potentially our future.

And let us all be clear: We will not, as a nation, build a better future for America by trying to erase America's past. This month and all year around, we must recognize the full arc of our Nation's history.

And as I have said many times before, I do believe history to be a relay race of sorts. We have each been passed the baton. And then we run our part the best way we can, and then we pass the baton to the next generation.

So, during Black History Month, we celebrate the heroes of the past, as well as those who currently carry the baton: the innovators and barrier breakers across our country and in this room. Those who inspire our Nation through their work and their example.

And as we work then to carry that baton further, let us continue to make progress in the many ways that we do, understanding the interconnection between all of our work and our collective work in the fight for justice.

When we replace, for example, every lead pipe in our Nation and put more electric buses on the road, we not only fight the climate crisis, we invest in infrastructure and all of those babies should—who should not have to drink toxic water.

We fight the crisis of maternal mortality and other health inequities, understanding it is about elevating our response to a public health crisis, and it is also about addressing systemic inequities that led to those outcomes in the first place.

When we make sure all entrepreneurs can access the capital they need to start and grow a business, we know it is about creating economic growth and opportunity, and also dealing with a history where far too many were excluded from the opportunity to be on that path of gaining economic wealth. When we help Americans afford to buy a home, we build intergenerational wealth and address the legacies of disparities.

In the relay race of history, the baton is in our hands. And we have a President of the United States who is so deeply committed—and I see this every day—who is so deeply committed to pass on a better and more just America.

So please join me in welcoming the President of the United States, Joe Biden.

*The President.* Well, thank you for that introduction. I want to thank Doug and Kamala.

You know, Jill, my wife—or I'm her husband. [*Laughter*] You all think I'm kidding. The—Jill wanted to be here. She just got back from her trip to Kenya and Namibia. And it was a very substantive trip, a powerful trip, as a follow-up to the African Leaders Summit we hosted here in December to deepen the relationship between America and countries across that continent.

She met with the Presidents and First Ladies of both countries. She spoke to more than a thousand young people—the first generation born out of apartheid in Namibia—and empowered them to—as keepers of democracy. In Kenya, she met families affected by devastating drought and food insecurity and—made worse by Putin's brutal assault on Ukraine. And it made it clear that America's commitment to Africa is real. And Jill showing up, just being there, is testament to that commitment. It was a trip she'll always remember.

And while she couldn't be here tonight, we're honored to welcome all of you to the White House—your house—for Black History Month.

And special thanks to members of the most diverse administration in history who are here—the most diverse administration in history. Right, Jim? [*Laughter*] Jim Clyburn. I tell you what, man. By the way, I wouldn't be standing here without Jim.

And thanks to the Members of Congress who are here, starting with the first Black party leader in Congress in our Nation's history, Hakeem Jeffries. He's here in spite of the fact, when he ran the first time, I campaigned for him—[*laughter*]—I tell you.

And the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, Steven Horsford. Steven, where are you? I campaigned for him too. [*Laughter*] I don't know what this means. They don't talk to me anymore though. I'm only kidding.

And the civil rights and business leaders who are here today.

And by the way, I've worked a long time with the presidents of my home State HBCU, Delaware State. Now, I—by the way, you said you played basketball. I want to introduce you to an All-American. *[Laughter]* Come here, pal. *[Laughter]*

*[At this point, the President invited Theodore Blunt, father of Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester, to the stage.]*

See this guy here? He's better than Tiny Archibald. *[Laughter]* This guy is—first-team, all—not a joke. Not a joke. He would have been playing pro ball, except his feet got flatter when he got older. *[Laughter]*

His one daughter ran my office in Delaware for a long time. The reason I'm here. And his second daughter here happens to be the Congressman from the State of Delaware.

But this guy—not only can he play ball, the reason his daughters have this kind of, I don't know, spark to change the world is because he did that too. So, anyway, I wanted to——

*Mr. Blunt.* Thank you, sir.

*The President.* Thank you, pal. Good to see you.

You know, I know real power when I see it: the Divine Nine. We're honored to have presidents—all the presidents here tonight. I want to thank you for the—and by the way, you know I'm not—I may be a White boy, but I'm not stupid. *[Laughter]* I know where the power is. I know where the—you think I'm joking. I learned a long time ago about the Divine Nine. *[Laughter]* And that's why I spent so much time at Delaware State, campaigning and organizing my campaign in Delaware.

But all the presidents are here. I think we're—I know—I don't think, I know we are the first administration in history to not only—and to have all the presidents here at one time, but we have a permanent office here for the Divine Nine.

But I got worried. We've got so many damn guys working with me from Morgan State, Morgan men, I'm a little worried about it. Anyway—I'm not going to get in the middle of that. *[Laughter]* I shouldn't kid about—I should know better. I should know better. *[Laughter]*

Look, folks, I also want to thank the marching band of Virginia State University. They welcomed you all as you entered the White House.

And of course, thanks to DuWayne, who you just heard from. DuWayne, I'm sure you didn't have a chance to check out Delaware State before Howard. *[Laughter]* But Howard is okay. I mean, Howard is a good school. I just—*[laughter]*.

By the way, I'm the only guy—for all of the power in this room, I'm the only guy who had the president of a Divine Nine school work for him—*[laughter]*—for years. And he got his doctorate while he was doing—working for me. And then he went off and became a president. What the hell did he want to do that for? I don't know. *[Laughter]*

But, anyway, all kidding aside, I want—you know, you may be President one day. Here's the one commitment I want from you. And that is, when they say, "Joe Biden is out in the waiting room," you promise me you will not say, "Joe who?" *[Laughter]* Okay? Deal? You know? All right.

As he just—DuWayne just referenced, he recently—we recently hosted a screening of the movie "Till." We hosted the screening because it's important to say from the White House for the entire country to hear: History matters. History matters. And Black history matters.

Look, I can't just choose to learn what we want to know. We learn what we should know. We have to learn everything: the good, the bad, the truth, and who we are as a nation. That's what great nations do. That's what great nations to do. And we're a great nation.

And that's why the greatest historic—great historian Carter G. Woodson, dean of Howard University more than a hundred years ago, had a vision and a purpose. He thought there should be a Black History Month. First guy to do, but I'm a—best of my knowledge. And it's turned into Black History—I think he said "Black History Week" the first time. And it turned into Black History Month.

And look, the legacy that has been continued by the Association for the Study of African Life—African American Life and History, it's a legacy that continues today as we celebrate the vast contributions Black Americans have made to American history.

You know, we celebrate all of you and the progress we've made together the past 2 years, progress to lay the foundation for a stronger, more resilient, more equitable economy that grows from the bottom up and the middle out so the poor have a ladder up, the middle class do well. And the wealthy always do well when everybody else does, so I ain't worried about them.

All kidding aside, they do well. This idea, somehow, we're only focusing on middle class and the poor. The wealthy do very well when the middle class are doing well.

We created over 12 million jobs, the strongest job growth of any Presidency in the first 2 years of our history. Black unemployment is near record lows. Wages for Black workers are up. And the 2 strongest years ever for small-business creation, which include strong growth in Black small businesses.

And guess what? It's not just the business that gets started. Imagine what the neighborhood was going to be without those small businesses—without the beauty shop, the drugstores. It's the center of what creates a community, the engines and glue to keep communities going. So it's not just the small business.

More Black Americans have health insurance today than any previous time in American history. And with the help of many of you, we've gotten millions of people insured under the Affordable Care Act by making it easier for them to sign up and making it more affordable, saving millions and millions of dollars overall for people making—and people getting \$800 a year—an \$800-a-year break in their health insurance.

For the first time, we've empowered Medicare to negotiate drug prices. We finally beat them. Finally took them on because of people in this room. And that means, instead of paying 3-, 400 bucks a month for insulin, as of January 1, it's capped at \$35 a month, period, for those on Medicare, for parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

We also capped out-of-pocket costs for seniors on Medicare at a maximum \$2,000, period, no matter what their costs are. They're not going to be more than \$2,000, beginning in 2025. Because some of those cancer drugs they have to pay for are \$10-, \$12-, \$14,000 a year, total—total. Two thousand dollars a year, no matter how much yours costs are.

We passed a law to make the biggest investment ever in climate than any time anywhere in history.

And look, in particular, focus what we talked about a lot—Jim and others and I—we talked about those fence-line communities—those fence-line communities—that suffered the most as a consequence of being smothered by pollution.

Think of "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana or Route 9 in the State of Delaware. They're the first—[inaudible]—we're going to take care of. They're the first of the Americans we're going to take care of with this new legislation.

And our once-in-a-generation infrastructure law is modernizing America's roads, bridges, ports, airports, and with equity at the center of everything we do.

Our Justice40 Initiative means that 40 percent of the overall benefits of clean energy, transit—and clean transit can—and many other things—is going to go to those underserved communities. That's the objective.

We're replacing, as was mentioned by my colleague—by my Vice President, our Vice President—poisonous lead pipes—for every child in America—being eliminated. We've got schools—400,000 schools and nurseries that have these lead pipes in them. We can turn on a faucet at home and drink clean water.

We're delivering affordable high-speed internet to every single household. No parent should have to pull up in front of McDonald's for their kid to be able to do their homework. No, no, it's for real.

Speaking of education, instead of a photo ops, we're delivering nearly \$6 billion—I promised we would do—\$6 billion for—to HBCUs. Without the kind of foundations that other schools have, we've got to make sure they have the same laboratories, the same research capacities as everybody else. Because their students can do anything anybody else can do, but they need to have the facility to do it.

We're going to increase their teaching and training capacity to attract millions of dollars from the private sector, investing in industries of the future like cybersecurity.

One of the best ways to close the racial wealth gap, as was referenced earlier, is to expand access to home ownership. That's how the vast majority of the middle class have done it. That's how they built wealth and stability and passed it down to their children or grandchildren.

That's why we're expanding efforts to build back a generational wealth through home ownership and aggressively—aggressively—combating racial discrimination in housing.

Folks, my administration oversees hundreds of billions of dollars in Federal contracts for everything from refurbishing aircraft carrier decks to installing railings in Federal buildings. So, as the President of the United States, I get to award those contracts.

Most of you don't know—I didn't even know; I've been around a long time—that back in 1933, they passed the American—"buy American" legislation. It doesn't violate any international rules. It says that the money the President of the United States is given by the Congress to award contracts, you should buy America first. It's been around a long time. But guess what? The vast majority of previous Presidents—Democrat and Republican—didn't apply it.

But if you want to build anything in America, it's got to be an American product and buy American. [Laughter] No, I'm not joking.

That's why Black- and Brown-owned businesses and other underserved communities have been historically underrepresented in such Federal contracting. I committed: By 2025, we're going to increase—15 percent every single contract I award as President of the United States will go to Black and Brown small businesses.

And the effect of that is that will bring an additional \$100 billion in Federal contracting money to these communities.

To deliver equal justice under the law, we're building a Federal bench with judges that reflect all of America, led by Ketanji Brown Jackson. I promised you a number of things. But very specifically, I said the first nominee to the Supreme Court is going to be a Black woman and that I was going to pick a Black woman to be Vice President of the United States of America.

We have appointed more Black women to the Federal circuit courts than every other President in history combined. Every single, solitary one. And by the way, Dick Durbin of Illinois deserves enormous credit for that getting done.

Look, after Senate Republicans blocked the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act last year, with your help—and some of you who are in this room actually helped me write it—I signed a historic Executive order requiring key elements of that bill in Federal law enforcement.

I banned chokeholds; greatly restricted no-knock warrants; created a national database for officer misconduct; and to lighten [tighten; White House correction] use-of-force policies emphasizing deescalation and the way in which police officers work; to take a fresh approach to recruit, hire, train law enforcement—all of which are tied to effective and accountable community policing and advance public trust and safety.

And as I made clear in the State of the Union, with the presidents [parents; White House correction] of Tyre Nichols as our guests—his mom and dad—we need the Congress to come together to pass police reform legislation.

With your help, I signed the first major gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years. And guess what? I'll say it again: We're going to ban assault weapons before we're out of here. Ban them. Ban them. Ban them.

Another thing about equal justice. I'm keeping my promise: No one should be in prison for the mere possession of marijuana. Too many minorities are in prison for that. So what I've passed—we should pardon them, expunge their records as if it never happened so they're—have a chance again in society.

And, folks, I just signed legislation—most people don't think is going to be very—consequential, but it is to the people there—legislation to cap the cost of phone calls in prisons—that prisons charge incarcerated people. Just a step toward basic dignity.

And, folks, last year, after the mass shooting in Buffalo, Jill and I spent time—I met with all those families. I also convened the first-of-its-kind White House Summit Against Hate-Fueled Violence that many of you called for and supported.

Together, we're saying loud and clearly that America—in America, hate will not prevail. Hate will not prevail. Silence is complicity. Silence—and we're not going to remain silent. Denialism is worse, and it is unacceptable.

With your help, I signed a law more than a hundred years in the making to finally make lynching a Federal hate crime—the Emmett Till law. It's amazing. A hundred years. And I—it's astounding.

You've joined me at the bill signing for other victories to protect the right to interracial and same-sex marriages, to make Juneteenth a Federal holiday.

You're—you know, you've been key partners on Executive orders that I've signed advancing racial equality and justice and support underserving communities—underserved communities. But we have to keep going. We're not finished yet.

Many of you have been working on these issues for a long, long time. We've gotten a lot done together. But we have a lot more to do, and people know—we have to, first of all, let people know what we've done.

Even in your communities, they don't know all that we've done. We have to make it clear. And we're not stopping. Because that gives them confidence that we're going to keep going. Remind them why it's important to get engaged and their voices do matter.

So we've got to talk about it. Spread the word. Defend our progress. Finish the job.

For example, my student debt relief plan, which will help tens of millions of folks—and on Pell grants—hit hard by the pandemic. About 70 percent of Black college students receive Pell grants. For many Black students, this savings will be so significant, including wiping out their entire student debt completely.

But currently, the only thing blocking that plan is opponents of the plan suing us. Today it was argued in the Supreme Court whether or not the—my plan is—able to be done by Executive order.

They're the same folks who had hundreds of thousands of dollars, even millions of dollars, in pandemic relief loans, forgiven—and many of them in Congress, by the way, Republicans—who voted for tax cuts for overwhelmingly benefit the wealthiest people in America, who are the people who paid to bring these suits.

Look, folks, you've got to give me a break.

My administration is making our case to the Supreme Court, and I'm confident the legal authority to carry out that plan is there. I promise you: I have your back, and this is so much more we can do.

Folks, we have to stand together to protect women's right to choose. We have to continue to fight for racial justice.

We cut Black child poverty in half in 2021 because of the child tax credit. Look, we need to help make that tax credit permanent now.

I signed the bipartisan Electoral Count Reform Act to protect the will of the people and the peaceful transfer of power. But we must get the Congress to vote on the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act. I made clear that we cannot let the filibuster be an obstacle to protecting that sacred right to vote.

Look, let me close with this. I'm going quickly because you've been standing a long time, and I apologize. *[Laughter]*

Last month, on would have been—what would have been Dr. King's 94th birthday, I spoke on the pulpit of—at Ebenezer on a Sunday service. The next day, on Dr. King's holiday, I joined Reverend Sharpton and the National Action Network to talk policy.

The day after, we stood here in the East Room with Steph Curry, an NBA Champion who is a supporter of the—and the Golden—champion Golden State Warriors that continue the storied tradition of Black athletes playing a role bigger than just the game they play: speaking out against racism; standing up for equality; encouraging people to vote; empowering children and their families to eat healthy, learn and play in safe places; rallying the country against gun violence.

In faith and action, policy and culture, and so much more, we see the vibrancy of Black culture and history enriching all of American life—all of American life. A history that can't be buried because it lives in the soul of this Nation. It's who we are. It's who we are. It matters.

As the gospel song sings: "We've come too far from where we started. Nobody told me the road would be easy. I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me." Folks—folks, I don't think the Good Lord brought us—any of us—this far to leave us behind.

We just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America, and there's nothing beyond our capacity. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

So happy Black History Month. May God bless you all. And enjoy the reception, which starts after the next performance that I'm about—that's about to be announced.

Where's the—all right, who's going to announce—they're going to announce it? All right.

*[Musicians Anthony Brown and Group therAPy performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing." The President then continued his remarks as follows.]*

Y'all can sing, man. *[Laughter]* You know, I know most of those songs for a simple reason: As my buddy from Delaware can tell you, when you're involved in the civil rights movement as a kid in high school—I used to go down to the Black church. I'd go to 7:30 mass; I'm a practicing Catholic. Then I'd go to 10 o'clock. And then we'd sit and plan what we're going to do, in terms of—you think I'm joking; I'm not.

And the only drawback I had, Jim, everybody thought I was a good guy except I can't sing worth a damn. *[Laughter]* My dad, when he was a college-aged—he didn't go to college, but he had a band. And my dad played the—a reed instrument. He played the saxophone and the clarinet. And he could sing, and he could dance.

He looked at me once, when I—said, "Joe, I don't know where you came from, honey. You have no lip." *[Laughter]* "You can't sing. And you can't carry tune in a wheelbarrow. But I still love you anyway."

But, at any rate, thank you all so much. I mean this sincerely. I want to thank the talent, but I also want to thank the talent in this room. We wouldn't be anywhere without the people in this room. Not a joke. Not only would I not be standing here, we wouldn't have passed all the stuff that's made a difference.

I look back on my career of 280 years here—*[laughter]*—but all kidding aside, every time we were told we couldn't do something, we got it done. And we're going to do it again.

So, as my mother—my Irish Catholic mom would say: "God bless you, dear. Let's go get 'em." Okay? Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:22 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Harris; President William S. Ruto of Kenya and his wife Rachel; President Hage G. Geingob of Namibia and his wife Monica; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Rep. James E. Clyburn; former National Basketball Association point guard Nathaniel "Tiny" Archibald; Marla Blunt-Carter, sister of Rep. Blunt Rochester; Tony Allen, president, Delaware State University; DuWayne Portis, Jr., student, Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, IL, who introduced the Vice President; RowVaughn Wells, mother, and Rodney Wells, stepfather, of Tyre Nichols, who died on January 10 as a result of injuries he received during an encounter with Memphis, TN, police officers following a traffic stop on January 7; and Alfred C. Sharpton, Jr., founder and president, National Action Network.

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C.; Ruto, William S.; Sharpton, Alfred C., Jr.; Wells, Rodney; Wells, RowVaughn ;Emhoff, Douglas C. .

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